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Revelation

for the Rest of Us

Study Guide

A PROPHETIC CALL
TO FOLLOW JESUS
AS A DISSIDENT DISCIPLE



INTRODUCTION

1. What are your most significant areas of confusion or concern in reading the book of Revelation?
2. What previous experiences do you have reading Revelation as speculation?
3. What are the possible dangers of reading Revelation as a speculator?
4. Why do you think the speculative approach is attractive to readers?

CH. 1—REVELATION FOR TOO MANY

1. According to the chapter, what does the speculative approach to Revelation seem to produce in people?
2. What have you seen the speculative approach produce in others?
3. How might the "rest of us" approach reading Revelation differently?
4. Have you noticed the pattern of speculation leading to excitement culminating in frustration?

CH. 2—FOR WHOM WAS REVELATION WRITTEN?

1. What is the significance of Revelation focusing not on how to predict the future, but to discern the present?
2. How might that change the way we read?
3. What role have dissidents played in human history?

4. How does thinking of John as a dissident change the way you read Revelation?
5. In what ways does Revelation critique both Empire and Church?

CH. 3—REVELATION AND IMAGINATION

1. What role does your imagination play in reading Revelation?
2. Have you incorporated imagination into other areas of scriptural reading?
3. How does thinking of Revelation as a performance change the way we might “see” and “hear” the narrative plot unfold?
4. In what ways does the imaginative world of Revelation ignite hope?

CH. 4—BABYLON'S IDENTITY

1. What stands out to you about the playbill of Revelation?
2. According to the chapter, what role does Babylon play in the overall drama of Revelation?
3. How does the timelessness of Babylon impact the relevance of Revelation for today?

CH. 5—BABYLON'S CHARACTERISTICS

1. Which of the seven character-traits (Anti-God, Opulent, Murderous, Image, Militaristic, Economically Exploitative, Arrogant) is most striking to you? Why?

2. In what ways does “domination” helpfully summarize the character of Babylon?
3. Where do you see these traits in our world?
4. Where do you see these traits in the church?
5. Where do you see these traits in yourself?

CH. 6—THE DRAGON AND ITS WILD THINGS

1. What do the beasts individually represent?
2. What does John intend to communicate with the number 666?
3. Where do you see the beastly forces of power and propaganda at work in our nation?

CH. 7—THE LAMB

1. What strikes you about John’s description of Jesus in chapter one?
2. What are the dangers of forgetting/missing that “the Lord, the Lion, is the Lamb”?
3. How are we to understand the violent imagery of Revelation?
4. How does the lamb win/conquer?

CH. 8—THE FAITHFUL WITNESSES

1. What does it mean that John evokes, but often does not explain?
2. What role does the woman play in the overall drama of Revelation?
3. What are the implications of the woman functioning as a composite image for the faithful witnesses of the seven churches?
4. In what ways are you being nurtured into being a faithful witness?
5. What opportunities do you have to resist the ways of Babylon, while witnessing to the reality of the Lamb?

CH. 9—THE DRAMA OF REVELATION

1. How have you read the narrative plot and flow of Revelation in the past?
2. What does it mean that Revelation is the “story of everything?”
3. What role does the broader biblical narrative play in our understanding Revelation?
4. What stories are currently narrative your life?
5. In what ways do you need to reconfigure the story that is narrating your life?

CH. 10—INTERLUDE ABOUT INTERLUDES

1. What is the function/purpose of an interlude?
2. What role do the interludes play in the narrative of Revelation?
3. Why do the authors consider the interludes to be the most significant feature of the book of Revelation?

CH. 11—THREE TIMES SEVEN = COMPLETION

1. Which section of the chapter (Immanent, Bittersweet, Answers To Prayers For Justice, Divine Judgment) stands out to you most? Why?
2. What is the significance of viewing the seals, trumpets, and bowls as the depiction of God establishing justice?
3. What role does the establishment of justice play in our faith as followers of the Lamb?
4. What are the dangers of Schadenfreude?
5. Where do you see the church celebrating the destruction of others?

The oppressed want to hear from God, and they want to experience his justice. They want to see judgment on evil, they want oppression to end, and they want injustices to be undone. They want to hear that their oppressors are scheduled for a date with the divine. They want to know that racism will end in equality, that starvation will end in a banquet, that exclusion from the city will end in open gates for all. The oppressed have felt the piercingly violent eyes of Babylon upon them and have stared into the face of the dragon in the wild things. They know evil when they see it, and they long for the light found in the Lamb's eyes. (p 115).

CH. 12—A PROPHET SPINNING PLATES

1. What role does memory play in stirring our imaginations? In our faith?
2. What is the distinction between “fulfillment” and “reactualization”?
3. What are some of the most important reactualizations in Revelation?

CH. 13—DIVINE JUDGEMENTS OR DISCIPLINES?

1. What is the significance of viewing the seals, trumpets, and bowls as disciplines as opposed to judgments?

2. Where else do we see the language of discipline in the Scriptural narrative?
3. In what ways do the seals, trumpets, and bowls invite us into witnessing and gospel'ing?
4. What opportunities do you have to witness and gospel?
5. Where does the church need discipline, repentance, and renewal?
6. Where might you need discipline, repentance, and renewal?

The divine intent of the disciplines is to clear out the rubble, the evil manifestations of the dragon and its wild things in the corrupted city of Babylon. Only then can new Jerusalem arrive without the fear of violence and the corruption of the dragon. Until one reads chapters 6–19 as the preparation for chapters 20–22, one doesn't Revelation well. But when you read them as an unfolding story, they all fit together. Before new Jerusalem descends to the earth, the debris, the rubble, and the garbage must be cleared away. The garbage dump of Revelation is a fiery pit where bad things burn up, and this fiery pit completely eliminates the way of the dragon, doing away with the dragon, the wild things, and Babylon itself. (p 135).

CH. 14—VISIONS OF FINAL JUSTICE

1. Ignoring the millennium entirely, what is your view of the book of Revelation?
2. What role might the millennium have played in igniting hope in the earliest followers of Jesus?
3. How should the millennium spark hope for us today?
4. What role do we play in injustice in our communities?

5. In what ways are we destined for judgment?
6. How are you posturing yourself in such a way that you continue to long for justice through judgment?

This is John's finest hour. The day for which he longed. This is the day on which evil will be eliminated from God's creation so the people of God can live in safety and peace and justice and so they can forever bask in the light of the Lamb. And his point is that these two belong together: eliminating evil and establishing justice. Nothing would be more chest-swelling to the seven churches than to know that someday the Lamb would rule, someday they would be safe to worship God, and someday the evils of Babylon would be erased into a long-forgotten history. (p 145).

CH. 15—A NEW JERUSALEM IMAGINATION

1. Which section of the chapter (New Creation, Theocracy, Ideal Temple, No-Temple Temple, Replacing Rome) stands out to you most? Why?
2. In what ways are you seeking to embody the ways of the New Jerusalem today?
3. Do our churches create microcosms of the New Jerusalem?
4. In what ways have you become comfortable in your faith and have ceased to cry, "Maranatha?"

CH. 16—NEW JERUSALEM AS PROMISE FOR VICTORS

1. What is the significance of viewing the New Jerusalem as the promise to the seven churches?
2. What does it mean to be victorious (conquer) in the book of Revelation?

3. What is the war weapon of the victors?
4. What does it mean for you to stand up, speak up, and speak out about the Lamb?

Justice will be the way of the Lamb for all. Peace will be the way of the Lamb for all. Love will be the way of the Lamb for all. Forever and ever. Ever abounding and flourishing and increasing in glory and love. (p 163).

CH. 17—BABYLON IN THE SEVEN CHURCHES

1. Which section of the chapter (Disorder Love, Distorted Teachings, Corrupted Worship, Inconsistent Behaviors) stands out to you most? Why?
2. Where do you see these at work in your church, community, or self?
3. What is the significance of viewing the issues in the seven churches as the presence of Babylon?
4. If Jesus were to give a speech to your church community, what would he affirm and rebuke?

CH. 18—WORSHIPING IN BABYLON

1. What worship practices (habits) mark your daily rhythms in Babylon?
2. How are your worship practices (habits) forming or deforming you in the way of the Lamb?
3. How does conceptualizing the songs of Revelation as spirituals affect our reading of Revelation?
4. What role do spirituals play in the life of a dissident?

5. What happens to the person who has cultivated the habit of singing these spirituals?

CH. 19—WORSHIP AS WITNESS

1. What is the significance of viewing our worship as our witness?
2. What role do both words and works play in your witness to the way of the Lamb in the midst of Babylon?
3. How does faith as allegiance transform the way we think about our apprenticeship to Jesus?
4. What is christoformity?
5. Why is it important?
6. Where are you facing challenges in your apprenticeship to Jesus?

CH. 20—FOUR MARKERS OF BABYLON TODAY

1. Which section of the chapter (Arrogance, Economic Exploitation, Militarism, Oppression) stands out to you most? Why?
2. Where do you see these markers at work in American Culture?
3. How have these infiltrated the church?
4. In what ways do you wrestle with these markers?

5. How are you swayed by the power and propaganda of Babylon?

CH. 21—HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE IN BABYLON?

1. How do these reflections affect your understanding of Christianity in America?
2. How does the book of revelation unveil insidious issues within the church?
3. What was the most unsettling about the chapter?
4. In the face of these challenges how have we lost hope?
5. In what ways have we lost hope?

CH. 22—A MANIFESTO FOR DISSIDENT DISCIPLES

1. Which section of the chapter (Word of God, Jesus as one True Lord, Discernment, Church Transcends, Gospel Proclamation, Christoform Power, One World Government, Gospel Mission, Confess and Pray) stands out to you most?
2. Why? How can the Barmen Declaration offer a helpful framework for discipleship in our present moment?
3. How can we reconfigure our discipleship toward being rightly public and political?